

World Café Table 7

Living your Values: the MCO's Living Values Project

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We acknowledge that universities today face excessive levels of complexity and uncertainty. This is as a result of varied expectations from various stakeholders and the changing world which has its own dynamics. Universities are not immune from these challenges. However, their current success and prospects for the future are contingent on their values. It is apposite at this point to quote from the Prospectus of Magna Charta Observatory, i.e.:

"Values have been at the heart of universities since their formation and remain an essential tool in dealing with these challenges, offering universities guidance for their conduct and decision-making. Whether it is traditional and more fundamental values of autonomy and academic freedom, social responsibility, or other values specific to institutional missions, values are crucial to helping universities understand and identify themselves and communicate that identity and mission to stakeholders".

Another quotation from the MCO Prospectus:

"To create and maintain a public trust in universities amid today's complexity and uncertainty, universities need to define their values explicitly, clearly communicate them to staff, students, and stakeholders, and demonstrate that their values inform practice and decision-making".

Values are a glue that keep universities together and this is how they have maintained their identity and integrity over a number of centuries. I guess we all agree that these values are sacrosanct.

It is necessary for the values of the university to be shared by everyone. This process needs to be facilitated in a consensual and collaborative way. In doing so, you will be driving a process that allows attitudes to change organically. It is always important to remember that people support what they have helped create. The success of shared values spring from engaging your critical stakeholders.

When it comes to our Living Values there should be no sacred cows, once we have committed ourselves to our Living Values then we need to own them. We also need to have a firm grasp of our own reality and be clear on the steps that we need to follow in this process.

There is also a need to embed our Living Values in the life of the university. What are the strategies, action plans, resource allocation, measurement and reward that you have put in place for this purpose? Present concrete evidence of how you have done this.

It is necessary to align stakeholders with the mission and values of your university. Our Living Values should be led by the President/Vice Chancellor/Rector of the university who may assign this responsibility to one of the senior Vice Presidents/Deputy Vice Chancellors/Vice Rectors. As a person who is doing this work or assigned to do it, you do the work with your team. Remember that you ride a problem with your team and not alone! There is a need of building a team that will

be driving this work and cascading it downward to all levels in the university. The President/Vice Chancellor/Rector of her/his Deputy must take every opportunity to communicate to all stakeholders and should do so directly.

I would like you to test the appropriateness of the values of your university against the following:

1. What are the values and principles of your university?
2. Are the values clear and understandable to all your stakeholders?
3. Are they important to the university? Are you all convinced that they are the best descriptors of your university?
4. Are they the minimum to communicate?
5. Are they convertible into tangible behaviours, actions and practices?
6. Do they support self-reflection, review and goal setting?
7. Will people understand, appreciate and incorporate them?
8. What do our students, faculty/staff, internal and external stakeholders think of our services/education and values?
9. Is it possible to assess the realisation and impact of tangible behaviours, actions and practices?
10. Are they free of jargon and written in a manner that fits the university?
11. Can they be easily memorised and repeated?
12. Are they narrow enough to help guide the key stakeholders and will they help avoid distractions?
13. Do they align with the university's vision and mission?
14. Why would students choose your university?